



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Dan Donovan (R-NY)

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, & Communication

"Ensuring Effective and Reliable Alerts and Warnings"

February 6, 2018

Remarks as Prepared

I want to welcome our witnesses here this morning to a hearing on an issue that is vital to the protection of Americans: effective and reliable alerts and warnings.

The numerous disasters and terrorist attacks that we witnessed over the past few months have illustrated that timely communication is crucial in an emergency situation, and the availability of critical information can help individuals protect themselves from harm's way.

While some of us grew up with emergency alert warnings through television, radio, or even warning sirens, many alerts today are also received through mobile devices, the internet, and social media.

Considering the technological advances that have been made over the past decade, we have high expectations for what our phones, tablets, and computers can do. At the very least, we expect that the alerts that come through on our devices are timely, accurate, and only sent when necessary.

During the Chelsea bombing in 2016, the New York City Emergency Management Department sent out three messages to the Chelsea neighborhood to alert individuals to shelter in place, once the situation was cleared, and to solicit the public's help in locating the suspect.

While these messages helped to protect individuals in a time of uncertainty, it was also reported that they were received far outside the target area. Although I understand that it is difficult to obtain 100 percent accuracy, I am glad that the FCC voted last week to require the delivery of alerts to 100 percent of the target area identified by the alert originator with no more than 1/10th of a mile overshoot. This kind of accuracy will help to deter warning fatigue.

Unfortunately, there have been erroneous emergency alerts sent to the public that undermines confidence in the system and the messages that are shared. We saw an example just this morning when an alert that was supposed to be a test instead warned multiple locations on the east coast that a tsunami was on its way.

In addition, there was the erroneous emergency alert issued by the State of Hawaii on January 13th, 2018, warning residents and visitors of a "Ballistic Missile Threat Inbound to Hawaii." I am very

concerned that this will result in a lack of response to actual events and could cause individuals to opt out of receiving life-saving messages entirely.

Because this incident occurred due to human error, I am interested in hearing more about the training and certification for message originators to ensure proper use of the system. In addition, I am interested to know more about the safeguards that should have been in place, and what, if anything, needs to be done at a federal level to make sure that this never happens again.

In addition, to improve the response to terrorist events, I encourage the FCC to take action on multimedia alerts, “many to one” feedback, and multilingual messaging to further the effectiveness of alerts and warnings. For example, if New York City Emergency Management was able to send out a picture of the suspect directly to recipients’ phones during the Chelsea bombing, or if recipients were able to respond to the message to report that they saw the Chelsea bombing suspect, it may have led to a faster apprehension of a terrorist. However, enhancements to the system will be meaningless if basic awareness of how to use the system is not met.

Considering the current threat environment in the United States evidenced by many incidents over the past few months, including two terrorist attacks in New York City in October and December of 2017, the accuracy and efficiency of WEA is critical. That way, when an imminent threat alert is sent, Americans can and will act accordingly to protect themselves and their loved ones.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today. I look forward to our discussion.

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